

The History of Work and Labour

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Abstract

As an aspect of economic (and later social) history, the study of work and labour relations – conveniently and mostly in hindsight termed ‘Labour History’ – has a long tradition in the Netherlands, where it has gone through several phases during more than a century. In the years before the Second World War, it started from a very broad basis, encompassing the entire period from the Middle Ages onwards. Dutch anthropologists also contributed to the history of work, especially with regard to the colonies. Similar to the position in other countries, this promising phase was followed by a more restricted concept of labour history, as the saga of male industrial breadwinners after the Industrial Revolution. The revival of the topic in the turbulent 1970s and 1980s brought an even narrower focus on the historical development of (leftist) collective action. In the latest phase, in the Netherlands since the 1990s all these elements have been combined in the new concept of Global Labour History, meaning the development of work at large, labour (wage and unfree) and labour relations worldwide.

Keywords: history, labour, labour history, global labour history, economic history, the Netherlands

Introduction

Work and labour certainly have not been at the centre of economic history as it developed over the last century. That may sound a little bit strange, because since Adam Smith, the *actors* or *dramatis personae* in the economic process, as Joseph Schumpeter called them, have been landowners, labourers and capitalists, organised in households and firms.¹ However, as to their numbers, the capitalists – i.e. the owners of the means of production – have constituted only a tiny minority, even if their direct assistants (directors,

¹ Joseph A. Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis* (London 1972) 554.

managers etc.) are included. Nevertheless, traditionally most of the attention of economic historians has been paid to their actions and motives, whereas the working population functions as a somewhat anonymous mass of consumers and producers with little agency.

More remarkable is the fact that the two longest serving directors of the Netherlands Economic History Archives (*Nederlandsch Economisch-Historisch Archief*, or NEHA), N.W. Posthumus and I.J. Brugmans, achieved academic fame for their PhDs on the history of Dutch industrial workers:² Posthumus (1880-1960) on the history of the workers in the woollen industry of Leiden in the Middle Ages, and Brugmans (1896-1992) on the Dutch working class 1813-1870.³ For them, labour history was more than just an integral and important aspect of economic history.

There is a good, but only partial, explanation for the neglect of working men and women among economic historians, and it is an institutional one. In the same way that general historians as well as economists started to neglect economic history as soon as the topic developed into an independent academic specialism, so economic historians reacted to the privatisation of social history and labour history. Economic history was first recognised as an independent field of interest with the nomination of Posthumus and G.W. Kernkamp in Rotterdam in 1913. Joint chairs for economic and social history followed from the 1950s onwards, special chairs for social history in the 1960s and 1970s, and in 1979, Rotterdam founded its own sub-faculty for *Maatschappijgeschiedenis* (the history of society). The emancipation of social history is also reflected by the split between the NEHA and the IISH in 1935 and in new journals, such as the *International Review of Social History* (1956) and the *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis* (the Dutch-Belgian Journal of Social History, 1975).

To begin with, I should offer a few words on the concept '(global) labour history', which over the years has seen its definition change. In many Western languages, there are two words for the human activities that are discussed here: labour and work. Originally, work was the generic and more general term to denote useful (sometimes even more creative) human activity, whereas labour implied toiling, or work of a hard or painful nature (cf. the expression 'a woman in labour'). However, this original distinction

2 N.W. Posthumus, *De geschiedenis van de Leidsche lakenindustrie* (I-III, 's-Gravenhage 1909-1939); I.J. Brugmans, *De arbeidende klasse in Nederland in de 19^{de} eeuw (1813-1870)* (1925). For the biographies of many of the historians mentioned in this contribution, see <http://www.historici.nl>.

3 Leo Noordegraaf, (ed.), *Ideeën en ideologieën. Studies over economische en sociale geschiedschrijving in Nederland 1894-1991* (Vols. I-II, Amsterdam 1991) 727-751, 759, 779-780.

is not very helpful for defining 'labour history'. From an originally very broad concept including all sorts of work, the most influential Anglo-Saxon authors since the 1880s narrowed down the focus to waged (or forced) work in market societies.⁴

In addition to this emphasis on wage labour, especially by men in industry,⁵ following the 1990s a new interest in the history of work at large emerged (including household work) in the Medieval and Early Modern Period, or outside the Atlantic area.⁶ For this return to the meaning of work in its broadest sense, the term 'global labour history' was coined.⁷ For practical reasons, the protagonists chose not to adopt the term 'work' instead of 'labour', but instead to redefine labour history as the history of all sorts of work, whether geared to the market or not. Along these lines, global labour history may be defined as the history of all work and labour practices, of labour relations, and of individual and collective actions aimed at improving labour conditions and labour relations, or preventing them from deteriorating.⁸

Against this background, labour history also started with a broad scope, whereas after the Second World War the focus of scholarly interest became limited to male industrial workers in order to broaden out into a true global labour history. These developments coincided with respectively decreasing and increasing international contacts and even relevance.

Starting from a broad base, ca. 1900-1940

For Posthumus, both economic and social history, as well as the history of work and labour, started in the medieval textile towns with the advent of

4 Jan Lucassen, 'Writing Global labour History c. 1800-1940: A Historiography of Concepts, Periods and Geographical Scope', in: Idem (ed.), *Global labour History. A State of the Art* (Bern 2006) 39-89.

5 With a strong emphasis on (socialist) collective action, cf. the series titled *Biografisch woordenboek voor de geschiedenis van het socialisme en de arbeidersbeweging in Nederland* (1-IX, Amsterdam 1986-2003; <http://socialhistory.org//bwsa>).

6 Chris Tilly and Charles Tilly, *Work under Capitalism* (Boulder 1998); Keith Thomas, *The Oxford Book of Work* (Oxford 1999); Josef Ehmer and Catharina Lis (eds.), *The Idea of Work in Europe from Antiquity to Modern Times* (Farnham 2009); Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, *Worthy Efforts: Attitudes to Work and Workers in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Leiden/Boston 2012).

7 Marcel van der Linden and Jan Lucassen, *Prolegomena for a Global Labour History* (Amsterdam 1999); Lex Heerma van Voss and Marcel van der Linden (eds.), *Class and Other Identities. Gender, Religion and Ethnicity in the Writing of European Labour History* (New York/Oxford 2002); Marcel van der Linden, *Workers of the World. Essays toward a Global Labor History* (Leiden/Boston 2008).

8 Jan Lucassen, *Outlines of a History of Labour* (Amsterdam: *IISH-Research paper* 51, 2013).

wage labour. Initially inspired by Karl Marx, Posthumus was interested in the origins of 'merchant capitalism' in the Dutch Republic and in the fate of the workers.⁹ Posthumus' conclusion about the developments of the workers' wellbeing until the sixteenth century is pessimistic in an implicit Marxist way.¹⁰ Thirty years later he concluded again that the workers in Leiden (and in the Republic) were the ultimate victims – in this case in a more vague way – not of the capitalists, but of the tides of international competition.¹¹ In both cases he did not attribute much collective agency to the workers themselves, stressing that the guilds played no role in this respect.¹²

In his inaugural lecture of 1894, the Leiden professor P.J. Blok (1855-1929) defended history as a social science. He also started his overviews of Dutch history with the working populations of the textile towns, and in particular – similar to Posthumus – of Leiden.¹³ This interest in the history of work and labour in the Netherlands between around 1500 and 1800 was shared by J.G. van Dillen, H.E. van Gelder and W.S. Unger, and by a number of authors of doctoral dissertations.¹⁴ G.W. van Ravesteyn defended his PhD (1906, supervised by G.W. Kernkamp) on the economic and social history of Amsterdam between 1500 and 1625. He concluded that a large part of the 'petite bourgeoisie', organised in corporations, became proletarian and that real wages decreased while the capital of the commercial and industrial 'haute bourgeoisie' increased.¹⁵ The history of the Haarlem bleacheries by S.C. Regtdoorzee Greup-Roldanus (1893-1984) and the studies on Dutch brick

9 Leo Noordegraaf, *Van vlas naar glas. Aspecten van de sociale en economische geschiedenis van Nederland* (Hilversum 2009) 85-109; Piet Lourens and Jan Lucassen, 'Marx als Historiker der niederländischen Republik', in: Marcel van der Linden (ed.), *Die Rezeption der Marx'schen Theorie in den Niederlanden* (Trier 1992) 430-454.

10 Posthumus, *Geschiedenis* Vol. I, 362.

11 Posthumus, *Geschiedenis* Vol. III, 1170-1173; Otto Pringsheim was more optimistic about the seventeenth century, *Beiträge zur wirtschaftlichen Entwicklungsgeschichte der vereinigten Niederlande im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig 1890) 48.

12 Cf. the contribution of Maarten Prak in this volume.

13 Noordegraaf, *Van vlas naar glas*, 16-35, 55. This is not the place to elaborate on nineteenth-century authors who took a serious interest in aspects of work, such as for example Robert Fruin (see his *Informacie 1514* in 1866 and the *Enquete 1494* in 1876) or W.J. Hofdijk (see his popularised history of daily life, 1858ff.).

14 Noordegraaf, *Van vlas naar glas*; Ad van den Oord, W.S. Unger (1889-1963). *Een eigengereid economisch historicus* ('s-Gravenhage 1996); J.G. van Dillen, *Mensen en achtergronden. Studies uitgegeven ter gelegenheid van de tachtigste verjaardag van de schrijver* (Groningen 1964) 552-566.

15 G.W. van Ravesteyn, *Onderzoekingen over de economische en sociale ontwikkeling van Amsterdam gedurende de 16^{de} en het eerste kwart der 17^{de} eeuw* (Amsterdam 1906) 166.

makers and madder (a textile dye) workers by Ba. van der Kloot Meyburg (1883-1950) are two other examples.¹⁶

It is not simple to explain why for many decades this type of what I would like to call in hindsight 'labour history' lost its attraction. Possibly partially because, in the words of Leo Noordegraaf, historical materialism in Dutch academia around 1900 already was 'broken in the bud', as exemplified by the careers of men like the social-democrats Posthumus and Van Dillen. Partially also because many of the most important scholars after their doctoral thesis pursued another calling, not in the least because they were women.¹⁷ In those days, and this continued for a very long time, this was a nearly unsurmountable impediment for making an academic career in the Netherlands.

Another reason was politics. W. van Ravesteyn became a full-time social-democratic and later communist politician. The most prolific writers about the conditions for workers were all politically very active, but they were also amateurs at history writing. This goes for the grand trio of B. Bymholt, W. Vliegen and H. Roland Holst-van der Schalk. All three gave their personal view of the development of the labour movement, which according to them started hesitantly around the mid-nineteenth century. It is a tale of a society in decay following the Golden Age, with a weakened, ailing, semi-drunken proletariat depending on charity, which after 1875 had to be revived by the twin factors of the Industrial Revolution and a specific kind – depending on the author – of socialism. Although greatly admired by their political comrades, these histories failed to impress professional historians at large. Besides, the histories of working Dutchmen from the Middle Ages until the eighteenth centuries became totally disconnected from those of their children and grandchildren in the nineteenth centuries.¹⁸

This splendid isolation of two types of histories of work and workers was not unique. The history of ideas and the history of work outside the

16 S.C. Regtdoorzee Greup-Roldanus, *Geschiedenis der Haarlemmer blekerijen* ('s-Gravenhage 1936). She became a member of the Board of Directors of the IIAV. B. Van der Kloot Meyburg, *De economische ontwikkeling van een zuid-hollandsch dorp (Oudshoorn) tot in den aanvang der twintigste eeuw* ('s-Gravenhage 1920) and her several articles in the *NEHA-Jaarboek*, followed by Johanna Hollestelle, *De steenbakkerij in de Nederlanden tot omstreeks 1560* (Assen 1961). All devoted considerable attention to women's work.

17 Noordegraaf, *Van vlas tot glas*, 62-83. Apart from Regtdoorzee Greup-Roldanus and Van der Kloot Meyburg, the following female historians devoted much attention to the working population, without attaining formal academic careers: E.M.A. Timmer, Leonie van Nierop, I.H. van Eeghen, and later also Johanna Hollestelle (see also Maarten Prak in this volume).

18 Jan Lucassen, *Jan, Jan, Jan Salie en diens kinderen. Vergelijkend onderzoek naar continuïteit en discontinuïteit in de ontwikkeling van arbeidsverhoudingen* (Amsterdam 1991).

Netherlands and Europe also followed their own compartmentalised paths. Between 1875 and 1897, H.P.G. Quack published his remarkably wide-ranging handbook *De Socialisten, Personen en Stelsels* (*The Socialists, People and Systems*) with a really Europe-wide coverage from Thomas Morus up to his own times (he witnessed Karl Marx at the Hague congress of the First International in 1872). Quack refused to take sides in all the controversies he described meticulously. That is why his work was little appreciated by Dutch Marxists of all kinds. Unfortunately, his history of ideas was not integrated into the history of work of the Dutch Republic, possibly with the exception of E. Kuttner's *Het Hongerjaar 1566* (*The Year of Famine 1566*), which directly linked the standard of living with Anabaptist and other radical ideologies of the time.¹⁹

The history of work outside Europe features some famous Dutch contributors, who – I cannot refrain from stressing – seemed to operate completely isolated from those working on the Low Countries. Most famous of all is H.J. Nieboer's Utrecht doctoral law dissertation (1900, supervised by S. Rudolf Steinmetz, who made his extensive notes on this topic available to his student) *Slavery as an Industrial System. Ethnological Researches*. H. Nieboer managed to systematise all the available ethnological and historical evidence and further to formulate general conditions for the rise and fall of this form of labour relations. This won him international fame.²⁰ Equally, from an ethnographic angle, came J.H. Boeke, who following his 1910 PhD, developed his theory on the original Indonesian village society, characterised as 'the old, wise, traditional pre-capitalism, moored in religion and tribal affinity', based on a stationary population as completely distinct from 'the young, aggressive Western capitalism'. This led to his influential thesis of the 'dual economy'. This had four implications for labour relations in the relevant context: 1) the Asian peasant prefers independent production most and, if pressed to provide supplementary income, cottage industry over factory labour; 2) intermediaries are necessary between the Asian peasant and the capitalist; 3) (young) female labourers are considered to be best apt to engage in industrial labour; and 4) a high turnover of industrial labourers and consequently low skills.²¹

19 Erich Kuttner, *Het hongerjaar 1566. Met een inleiding van J. Romein* (Amsterdam 1974); he does not refer to Quack, but see the latter's chapters VI and VIII in Vol. I of *De Socialisten*.

20 André Köbben, 'Why Slavery?' in: Tom Brass and Marcel van der Linden (eds.), *Free and Unfree Labour. The Debate Continues* (Bern 1997) 77-90.

21 J.H. Boeke, *Inleiding tot de economie der inheemsche samenleving in Nederlands-Indië, ten behoeve van hen die met de economie van de Indische dorps huishouding te maken krijgen* (Leiden 1936); Idem. *Oosterse Economie* (Den Haag 1946) 7, 78-82.; Cf. J. Thomas Lindblad, 'Trends en bedrijfsvoering in de koloniale landbouw: voorbeelden uit Nederlands Indië, c. 1915-1940', in: H.

Although some adhered to this dual economy theory, this had no impact witness the zero influence until recently Boeke's thesis on the study of Dutch labour history. The same goes for Boeke's most talented student, J.C. van Leur, who further developed his supervisor's ideas about the mercantile sector by defending an Indocentric vision, which had also far-reaching implications for the history of work and labour in Southeast Asia.²²

Narrowing down the topic, ca. 1940-1970

The Second World War and the decolonisation of Indonesia reinforced the tendencies to narrow down the scope of Dutch academia which had already set in. This in particular applied to academic historical research and I.J. Brugmans is a clear example of this.²³ Notwithstanding his foreign experience and his long stay in the Dutch East Indies after 1929, where he founded the Humanities Faculty of the University of Batavia in 1940 and became its first professor of history until 1946 (with a long interruption during his internment in a Japanese prisoner camp), he restricted his main research to the history of the Dutch working class in the nineteenth century. Not at all a Marxist,²⁴ he turned much of H. Roland Holst's vision upside down, suggesting it was not a conspiracy by the capitalists, but (compare Posthumus' later work on the eighteenth century) long-term and international circumstances nobody could change, that were to blame. No *Verelending*, but instead an awakening of the Dutch workers by the wave of industrialisation at the end of the nineteenth century.

At the IISH, Posthumus was succeeded by A.J.C. Rüter (1907-1965), who even more than his NEHA colleague Brugmans, concentrated his efforts on the Dutch labour movement. His topics and the periods covered were new: the national railway strikes of 1903 and 1943 as a mirror for the (im)

Diederiks, J. Thomas Lindblad and B. de Vries (eds.), *Het platteland in een veranderende wereld. Boeren en het proces van modernisering* (Hilversum 1994) 57-78.

22 Jacob Cornelis van Leur, *Eenige beschouwingen betreffende den ouden Aziatischen handel* (Middelburg 1934); Idem, *Indonesian Trade and Society. Essays in Asian Social and Economic History* (De Haag 1955); Jaap Vogel, *De opkomst van het Indocentrische geschiedbeeld. Leven en werken van B.J.O. Schrieke en J.C. van Leur* (Hilversum 1992); Matthias van Rossum, *Werkers van de wereld. Globalisering, maritieme arbeidsmarkten en de verhouding tussen Aziaten en Europeanen in dienst van de VOC* (Hilversum 2014).

23 E.J. Fischer, 'Het beleid van het NEHA tussen 1914 en 1989', in: E.J. Fischer, J.L.J.M. van Gerwen, and J.J. Seegers (eds.), *De Vereeniging Het Nederlandsch Economisch Historisch Archief* (Amsterdam 1989) 11-34, 23-24.

24 E.g. I.J. Brugmans, 'Ras en geschiedenis', *De Gids* 100 (1936) 343-357, 357.

possibility of organised industrial workers to achieve their goals. Rüter's inspiration from English and French historians was also new, as his predecessors had been strongly influenced by the German traditions.²⁵ Rüter's successor, F. de Jong Edzoon (1919-1989), followed the same track in his research interests, but further narrowed it down to one specific trade union: the social-democratic Nederlands Verbond van Vakverenigingen (Dutch Trade Union Confederation, or NVV).²⁶ When such key players increasingly restricted the content of labour history, not much else could be expected from others, as is witnessed by the content of the *Economisch-Historisch Jaarboek* and the *International Review of Social History* in those years.

Remarkably, at an advanced age Posthumus took a diametrically opposed direction by publishing in 1957 the first issue of the *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* (JESHO).²⁷ However, this journal, published in Leiden, only had a limited significance for the history of work and labour and certainly counted no Dutch contributors in this field. The same has to be said – with a few exceptions – about the *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* (officially subtitled as *Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia*).²⁸ One of the few Dutch historians in this sub-period with an interest in labour issues beyond Europe was W.S. Unger, who provided two basic articles on the Dutch slave trade.²⁹

A number of Dutch authors dared to write overviews in the fields discussed here, covering the entire period from the Middle Ages (W. Jappe

25 A.J.C. Rüter, *Historische studies over mens en samenleving*. Onder redactie van Th. J.G. Locher, W. den Boer, and B.W. Schaper (Assen 1967); Idem, *De spoorwegstaking van 1903. Een spiegel der arbeidersbeweging in Nederland* (Leiden 1935).

26 John P. Windmuller and C. de Galan, *Arbeidsverhoudingen in Nederland* (Utrecht/Antwerpen 1977) originally John P. Windmuller, *Labour Relations in the Netherlands* (Ithaca NY 1969) provides a good summary of the *communis opinio* at the time. For the catholic vision see L.G.J. Verberne, *De Nederlandse arbeidersbeweging in de negentiende eeuw* (Utrecht/Antwerpen 1955), which actually deals with the period 1870-1914.

27 Harriet T. Zurndorfer, 'The Orientation of JESHO's Orient and the problem of "Orientalism": Some Reflections on the Occasion of JESHO's Fiftieth Anniversary', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 51:1 (2008) 2-30.

28 E. Zürcher, 'The Chinese communes', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 118:1 (1962) 68-90; W.F. Wertheim, *Indonesian Society in Transition, A study of social change* (The Hague/Bandung 1959); G. Locher, 'The future and the past. Wertheim's interpretation of Indonesia's social change', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 117:1 (1961) 64-79.

29 Van den Oord, W.S. Unger, 85-93; Also: Willemina Kloosterboer, *Onvrije arbeid na de afschaffing van de slavernij* ('s-Gravenhage: Excelsior 1954), translated as *Involuntary Labour since the Abolition of Slavery: A Survey of Compulsory Labour throughout the World* (Westport Conn 1976); and her supervisor, J.J. Fahrenfort, *Over communisme en privaatbezit bij natuurvolken* (Groningen / Den Haag / Batavia 1934), Idem, 'Over vrije en onvrije arbeid', *Mensch en Maatschappij* 19 (1943) 29-51; Idem, *Socialisme in oude tijden* (Amsterdam 1945).

Alberts et al.³⁰), antiquity (F.J.H. van der Ven) and even pre-history (D.C. van der Poel) onwards to the present. The series of overviews of Dutch social and economic history by Jappe Alberts, Van Dillen and Brugmans were to serve as convenient summaries of what was known about the history of work. Far less a contribution in this regard was made by the first Dutch manual for the social and economic history of Europe by Van der Poel.³¹ More relevant here is Van der Ven's (1907-1999) *Geschiedenis van de arbeid* (*History of Labour*, 3 Vol. Utrecht/Antwerp, 1965-1968). This overview of labour relations in the West follows a legal, organic interpretation scheme.³² It is very likely that in addition, the rash upheaval of academia and not in the least of social history in the decades to follow would make these overviews less relevant.

A fight between 'genuine' and 'structural' social history, ca. 1970-1990

This is exactly what happened in the 1970s and 1980s. From a relative backwater, monopolised by the recent trade union history of the Netherlands and largely detached from the increasingly few interesting studies on labour relations elsewhere and in earlier periods,³³ labour history suddenly became popular. Two different developments took place in the field of history of work in the Low Countries and in Europe as a whole, which very soon clashed, occasionally also crossing paths with new approaches to non-European history.

30 W. Jappe Alberts, H.P.H. Jansen and J.F. Niermeyer (eds.), *Welvaart in Wording. Sociaal-Economische Geschiedenis van Nederland van de vroegste tijden tot het einde van de middeleeuwen* ('s-Gravenhage 1977); J.G. van Dillen, *Van Rijkdom en Regenten. Handboek tot de Economische en Sociale Geschiedenis van Nederland tijdens de Republiek* ('s-Gravenhage 1970); I.J. Brugmans, *Paardenkracht en Mensenmacht. Sociaal-Economische Geschiedenis van Nederland 1795-1940* ('s-Gravenhage 1961); for Belgium cf. J.A. van Houtte, *Schets van een economische geschiedenis van België* (Leuven 1943); Idem, *Economische geschiedenis van de Lage Landen* (Haarlem 1979).

31 D.C. van der Poel, *Hoofdlijnen der Economische en Sociale geschiedenis sociologisch beschouwd* (2 vols. 1952).

32 F.J.H.M. van der Ven, *Geschiedenis van de arbeid* (Vol. I-III, Utrecht/Antwerpen 1965-1968) III 134-165.

33 Although not specifically aimed at labour history, the fierce critique on historian's compartmentalisation in Z.R. Dittrich and A.M. van der Woude, 'De geschiedenis op de tweesprong', in: Noordergraaf, *Ideeën*, 241-257 (originally published in *Mens en Maatschappij* 34 [1959, 361-380]) applies very well.

First there was the Annales School, interested in the *longue durée* and for that reason more in rural than in urban history.³⁴ This is why it was soon picked up by the medievalist and agricultural historian B. Slicher van Bath.³⁵ He interpreted the actual work, the standard of living and labour relations in the countryside primarily in terms of production techniques. His interdisciplinary Wageningen School (the best known are A. van der Woude, J. Faber and H. Roessingh), became deeply influenced by the Annales.³⁶ Without any doubt, Roessingh in his publications on the Veluwe and its tobacco farmers, treated the history of work with the greatest depth. The lack of interest of the Wageningen school in the period after 1850 is remarkable. On the other hand, Slicher later on broadened the scope to colonial Latin America.³⁷

Structural social history, as it came to be known, also became popular among the group of social historians who in 1975 started the *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis*,³⁸ the successor to the *Mededelingenblad. Orgaan van de Nederlandse Vereniging tot beoefening van de Sociale Geschiedenis* (*Newsletter of the Dutch Association for the Study of Social History*), published since 1953 and devoted to the history of the labour movement.³⁹ It initiated a deep division among virtually all involved in the history of work, labour and labour relations. The conflict was perceived as one between on the one hand Theo van Tijn (1927-1992), Professor of Economic and Social History at Utrecht University after 1970, and on the other hand Ger Harmsen (1922-2005), Professor of Dialectic Philosophy and Historical Social Science at Groningen University after 1973. This split became clear in 1976, when Ger Harmsen, Jacques Giele, Bob Reinalda and others started their own annual periodical, the *Jaarboek voor de Geschiedenis van Socialisme en*

34 Dittrich and Van der Woude, 'De geschiedenis', 257, fn. 257 mention it as the first among the 'standard-bearers' of academic history; K. Bertels, *Geschiedenis tussen structuur en evenement. Een methodologisch en wijsgerig onderzoek* (Amsterdam 1973).

35 B.H. Slicher van Bath, *De agrarische geschiedenis van West-Europa (500-1850)* (Utrecht/Antwerpen 1960), 'Preface', in: *AAG Bijdragen* Vol.15 (1970) Slicher even discusses palaeo-demography, and in the same issue also 'serfdom in Eastern Europe'.

36 See their publications in the *AAG Bijdragen* (1959 onwards).

37 For non-European history, he attracted J.S. Wigboldus, a specialist on tropical agricultural history.

38 Ad van der Woude (Wageningen) and Theo van Tijn (one of the founders of the TSG) cooperated closely as editors of the ('New') *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*; cf. A.M. van der Woude, 'De "Nieuwe Geschiedenis" in een nieuwe gedaante', in: *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 5 (Haarlem 1980) 9-35.

39 The *Mededelingenblad* started to grow substantially after 1973, when at the same time the page size was enlarged.

Arbeidersbeweging in Nederland (Yearbook for the History of Socialism and Workers' Movement in the Netherlands),⁴⁰

Harmsen and his circle maintained that a distinction had to be made between genuine (*eigenlijke*) and non-genuine (*oneigenlijke*) historical forces – between the socialist conscious labour movement that shaped history, against organisations of employers, but also of non-socialist, i.e. Christian trade unions that had no history of their own because they obeyed the blind laws of capitalism in the end. Van Tijn, to the contrary developed a formal analytical explanatory model for the success and failure of trade unions, defined as selling cartels of labour.⁴¹ In his turn, Harmsen conceived this as an insult to the trade unionist cadre, for whom he had written a manual. Also related were controversies about the social stratification of Dutch society in the nineteenth century, about early 'spontaneous' popular rebellions and other issues. Although both have always denied it, political incompatibility must have also played an important role. Van Tijn was a Trotskyite from early youth, whereas Harmsen had long been a member of the Communist party, and later of the Pacifist-Socialist Party.

Although the controversy absorbed a great deal of energy in the second half of the 1970s and in the early 1980s, it did not prevent labour history from blossoming. It is hard to make a fair selection of examples,⁴² but let me try. First, the standard of living debate, started by Posthumus was revived.⁴³

40 I follow here to a great extent J. Bank, 'Het socialisme', in: P. Luykx and N. Bootsma (eds.), *De laatste tijd. Geschiedschrijving over Nederland in de 20^e eeuw* (Utrecht 1987) 135-165, here 138ff; see also Maarten Duijvendak and Pim Kooij, *Sociale geschiedenis. Theorie en thema's* (Assen/Maastricht 1992) 69-81, 88-93. For the ideas of Van Tijn see Boudien de Vries et al. (eds.), *De Kracht der Zwakken. Studies over arbeid en arbeidersbeweging in het verleden* (Amsterdam 1992); for Harmsen: Ger Harmsen, *Idee en beweging. Bekomentarieerde bibliografie van de geschiedenis van socialisme en arbeidersbeweging in Nederland* (Nijmegen 1972); Ger Harmsen and Bob Reinolda, *Voor de bevrijding van de arbeid. Beknopte geschiedenis van de Nederlandse vakbeweging* (Nijmegen 1975).

41 Cf. De Vries, *De Kracht*. Van Tijn's ideal to integrate economic, social, political and cultural history did not raise clear objections among the Harmsen group, see Theo van Tijn, 'Het sociale leven in Nederland 1844-1875', in: *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 12 (Haarlem 1977) 131-166; Idem, 'De schone kunsten', *Ibidem* 251-266; Idem, 'Het sociale leven in Nederland', in: *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 13 (Haarlem 1978) 77-100, 295-326.

42 Partially because I have been an active participant in this phase (see Marcel van der Linden and Leo Lucassen (eds.), *Working on Labor. Essays in Honor of Jan Lucassen* (Leiden/Boston 2012), partially because of the great number of publications involved.

43 I.a. P.H.M.G. Offermans, *Arbeid en levensstandaard in Nijmegen (1550-1600)* (Zutphen 1972); Leendert Noordegraaf, *Hollands welvaren/ Levensstandaard in Holland 1450-1650* (Bergen 1985); Idem, *Van vlas naar glas*, 193-241; Leo Noordegraaf and Jan Luiten Van Zanden, 'Early Modern economic growth and the standard of living: did labour benefit from Holland's Golden Age?', in: Karel Davids and Jan Lucassen (eds.), *A Miracle Mirrored. The Dutch Republic in European*

However, this has continued until now, without yet reaching consensus. Van Zanden in his *Arbeid tijdens het handelskapitalisme (Labour during commercial capitalism, 1991)* placed the emphasis on the supply of 'proto-proletarians', which kept wages low, whereas Jan de Vries attached great value to the increased purchasing power in the Golden Age – in a way a precursor to his later idea of an 'Industrious Revolution'.⁴⁴ Second, labour processes and routines, both urban and rural, and permanent and seasonal (partially inspired by the *History Workshop Journal* and movement).⁴⁵ There were many monographs for specific sectors such as the building trades⁴⁶, manual labour, agricultural work, peat digging and dredging,⁴⁷ brick making,⁴⁸ and flax harvesting and processing.⁴⁹ Third, collective actions (inspired by the writings of E.P. Thompson) in the time of the Dutch Republic⁵⁰ and the early nineteenth century,⁵¹ as well as in the emerging trade unions.⁵² Fourth, a rejuvenation of poverty and charity studies, starting with C. Lis and H. Soly's wide ranging *Poverty and Capitalism in Pre-Industrial*

Perspective (Cambridge 1995); Richard Paping, 'Voor een handvol stuivers'. *Werken, verdienen en besteden: de levensstandaard van boeren, arbeiders en middenstanders op de Groninger klei, 1770-1860* (Groningen 1995).

44 Jan de Vries, *The Dutch Rural Economy in the Golden Age, 1500-1700* (New Haven/London 1974); Jan Luiten van Zanden, *The Rise and Decline of Holland's Economy* (Manchester 1993); See Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy. Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500-1815* (Cambridge 1997) 647-654, and especially 691 where they disagree with Van Zanden on this point.

45 Jacques J. Giele, *Arbeidersleven in Nederland 1850-1914* (Nijmegen 1979); J.M. Welcker, *Heren en arbeiders in de vroege Nederlandse arbeidersbeweging 1870-1914* (Amsterdam 1978).

46 Ad Knotter, *Economische transformatie en stedelijke arbeidsmarkt. Amsterdam in de tweede helft van de negentiende eeuw* (Zwolle 1991).

47 Ger Harmsen and Johan Frieswijk (eds.), *Imke Klaver. Herinneringen van een Friese landarbeider. Enkele opgetekende zaken uit het jongste verleden tot 1925* (Nijmegen 1974); Johan Frieswijk, *Om een beter leven. Land- en veenarbeiders in het Noorden van Nederland 1850-1914* (Ljouwert 1989); Hein Mol, *Memoires van een havenarbeider* (Nijmegen 1980).

48 Piet Lourens and Jan Lucassen, *Arbeitswanderung und berufliche Spezialisierung. Die lip-pischen Ziegler im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Osnabrück 1999).

49 Noordegraaf, *Van vlas naar glas*, 113-121, 243-265.

50 Rudolf Dekker, 'Labour conflicts and working class culture in early-modern Holland', *IRSH* 35:3 (1990) 377-420; Pepijn Brandon, 'Wie raapt de spaanders? Onrust aan de Amsterdamse admiraliteitswerf in 'rustige jaren', *Holland. Historisch Tijdschrift* 45 (2013) 132-136.

51 Vincent Vrooland and Jeroen Sprenger, 'Dit zijn mijn beren!', *Een studie over arbeidsverhoudingen tijdens de aanleg van het Noordhollands Kanaal* (Amsterdam 1976).

52 Jacques J. Giele, *De Eerste Internationale in Nederland. Een onderzoek naar het ontstaan van de Nederlandse arbeidersbeweging van 1868 tot 1876* (Nijmegen 1973); Welcker, *Heren en arbeiders*.

Europe (1979).⁵³ Fifth, studies on remuneration systems.⁵⁴ Sixth and finally, the development of the mature trade union movement during and after the First World War,⁵⁵ during the Great Depression,⁵⁶ and during and after the Second World War.⁵⁷

Remarkably, all these endeavours were to a great extent confined to the Netherlands or at best to Western Europe⁵⁸ (Lis and Soly). This meant that none of this impressive work sought cross-fertilisation from non-European labour history scholars such as Jan Breman and Peter Boomgaard. An exception is Wertheim. The latter's commitment to revolutionary movements in Asia and in particular to Communist China met with a lot of sympathy, but that had no consequences for research. The revolutionary mood of the time also produced remarkably naive offspring, such as for example a 'history for ordinary people'.⁵⁹ The other side of the coin was that the revolutionary enthusiasm of those years dwindled rather quickly, leaving in particular the topics cherished by the Harmsen School orphaned. The fate of the short-lived *Jaarboek* (1976-1980) had been the writing on the wall.

53 Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, *Poverty and Capitalism in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Hassocks Sussex 1979), an impressive study followed by others, e.g. Marco H.D. van Leeuwen, *Bijstand in Amsterdam, ca. 1800-1850. Armenzorg als beheersings- en overlevingsstrategie* (Amsterdam 1990).

54 Frank Pot, *Zeggenschap over beloningssystemen 1850-1987* (Leiden 1988); Henny Gooren and Hans Heger, *Per mud of bij de week gewonnen. De ontwikkeling van beloningssystemen in de Groningse landbouw, 1800-1914* (Groningen 1993).

55 Lex Heerma van Voss, *De doodsklok voor den goeden ouden tijd. De achturendag in de jaren twintig* (Amsterdam 1994); Henk Wals, *Makers en Stakers. Amsterdamse bouwvakarbeiders en hun bestaansstrategieën in het eerste kwart van de twintigste eeuw* (Amsterdam 2001); For other highly neglected professional organisations see e.g. Sue-Yen Tjong Tjin Tai, Mila Davids and Harry Lintsen, 'Hoe moderniseerden bakkers aan het begin van de twintigste eeuw? De betekenis van de Nederlandsche Bakkersbond en het Station voor Maalderijen en Bakkerij', *TSEG* 10:3 (2013) 55-79.

56 A good overview can be found in W. ten Have, 'De geschiedschrijving over crisis en verzuiling', in: W.W. Mijnhardt (ed.), *Kantelend geschiedbeeld. Nederlandse historiografie sinds 1945* (Utrecht/Antwerpen 1983) 256-288.

57 Paul Coomans, Truike de Jong and Erik Nijhof, *De Eenheidsvakcentrale (EVC) 1943-1948* (Groningen 1976).

58 Exceptions are Lis and Soly, *Poverty and Capitalism* and Jan Lucassen, *Migrant Labour in Europe 1600-1900. The Drift to the North Sea* (London 1987) and the early IISH-publications cited in fn. 68.

59 Paul Offermans and Bernt Feis, *Geschiedenis van het gewone volk van Nederland* (Ooy 1975).

Global Labour History, ca. 1990-2014

Luckily, this cannot be said about labour history as a whole, as the integration and internationalisation of all the isolated initiatives of the foregoing decades were accomplished after all in the last decades. This became possible both institutionally and theoretically. A pamphlet entitled *The Dutch History as a deviant of the general human pattern* (1988), finally resulting in an international research group and a publication, was possibly the first step.⁶⁰ It aimed on the one hand at a systematic integration of different aspects of Dutch history, including labour history, and on the other, at international comparisons.

In the same year as the pamphlet, a Research School for Economic and Social History in the Netherlands and Flanders was founded: the N.W. Posthumus Institute.⁶¹ It greatly enhanced co-operation within the field. In addition, around that time a research department was founded at the International Institute of Social History, which chose as its 'core business', labour history, which was soon to develop into global labour history.⁶² Sub-projects concerned racism and the labour market,⁶³ migration history,⁶⁴

60 Karel Davids, Jan Lucassen and Jan Luiten van Zanden, 'De Nederlandse geschiedenis als afwijking van het algemeen menselijk patroon. Een aanzet tot een programma van samenwerking', in: Noordegraaf, *Van vlas naarglas*, 571-589 (originally 1988); Karel Davids and Jan Lucassen (eds.), *A Miracle Mirrored. The Dutch Republic in European Perspective* (Cambridge 1995).

61 See <http://www.hum.leiden.edu/posthumus>.

62 The IISH also appointed researchers, specialising in non-European social and labour history. See the annual reports of the institute at <http://socialhistory.org/nl/annualreports> and Jaap Kloosterman and Jan Lucassen, *Rebels with a Cause. Five centuries of social history collected by the IISH* (Amsterdam 2010).

63 Marcel van der Linden and Jan Lucassen (eds.), *Racism and the Labour market: Historical Studies* (Bern 1995).

64 Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen (eds.), *Migration, Migration History, History: Old Paradigms and New Perspectives* (Bern 1997); Jan Lucassen, Leo Lucassen and Patrick Manning (eds.), *Migration History in World History. Multidisciplinary Approaches* (Leiden/Boston 2010); Ulbe Bosma, Gijs Kessler and Leo Lucassen (eds.), *Migration and Membership Regimes in Global and Historical Perspective. An Introduction* (Leiden/Boston 2013); Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen (eds.), *Globalizing Migration History. The Eurasian Experience (16th-21st centuries)* (Leiden/Boston 2014). See also the contribution by Marlou Schrover in this issue.

free and unfree labour,⁶⁵ collective labour law,⁶⁶ and wages and currencies,⁶⁷ in addition to organisational issues.⁶⁸

Equally novel was the approach of comparing worldwide work, labour and labour conditions in specific sectors (for example sailors,⁶⁹ dock workers,⁷⁰ textile workers⁷¹ and soldiers⁷²). The study of production chains was an alternative strategy, showing the interconnectedness between labour conditions and labour relations in the different chains that constitute a production column.⁷³ The current project on the labour history of the Iranian oil industry combines different aspects of the approaches mentioned.⁷⁴ Finally, important projects on women's and children's labour were initiated. They show not only that such studies are feasible, for the sixteenth to eighteenth

65 Tom Brass and Marcel van der Linden (eds.), *Free and Unfree Labour: The debate continues* (Bern 1997).

66 Aad Blok et al. (eds.), *Urban Radicals, Rural Allies. Social Democracy and the Agrarian Issue* (Bern 2002).

67 Jan Lucassen (ed.), *Wages and Currency: Global Comparisons from Antiquity to the Twentieth Century* (Bern 2007).

68 Marcel van der Linden and Frits van Holthoorn (eds.), *Internationalism in the Labour Movement, 1830-1940* (Vols. I-II, Leiden 1988); Marcel van der Linden and Jürgen Rojahn (eds.), *The Formation of Labour Movements, 1870-1914* (Vols. I-II, Leiden 1990); Marcel van der Linden (ed.), *Social Security Mutualism: The Comparative History of Mutual Benefit Societies* (Bern 1996); Idem, (ed.), *The International Confederation of Trade Unions* (Bern 1996); Dennis Bos, *Waarachtige volksvrienden. De vroege socialistische beweging in Amsterdam, 1848-1894* (Amsterdam 2001); Lex Heerma van Voss, Patrick Pasture and Jan de Maeyer (eds.), *Between Cross and Class: Comparative Histories of Christian Labour in Europe 1840-2000* (Bern 2005); Marcel van der Linden and Richard Price (eds.), *The Rise and Development of Collective Labour Law* (Bern 2000).

69 Paul C. van Royen, Jaap R. Bruijn and Jan Lucassen (eds.), *"Those Emblems of Hell"? European Sailors and the Maritime Labour Market, 1570-1870* (St. John's Newfoundland 1997; *Research in Maritime History* 13); Richard W. Unger (ed.), *Shipping and Economic Growth 1350-1850* (Leiden/Boston 2011); for both articles and a bibliography on sailors see the *Tijdschrift voor Zeegeschiedenis*.

70 Sam Davies et al. (eds.), *Dock Workers. International Explorations in Comparative Labour History 1790-1970* (Aldershot 2000).

71 Lex Heerma van Voss, Els Hiemstra-Kuperus and Elise Van Nederveen Meerkerk, *The Ashgate Companion to the History of Textile Workers, 1650-2000* (Farnham/Burlington 2010); for the history of textile workers see also the *Textielhistorische Bijdragen*.

72 E.J. Zürcher (ed.), *Fighting for a Living. A Comparative History of Military Labour in Europe and Asia, 1500-2000* (Amsterdam/Open Access Series *Work Around the Globe*, 2014).

73 Karin Hofmeester, 'Working for diamonds from the 16th to the 20th century', in: Marcel van der Linden and Leo Lucassen (eds.), *Working on Labor. Essays in Honor of Jan Lucassen* (Leiden and Boston 2012) 20-46; Willem van Schendel, 'Green plants into blue cakes: working for wages in colonial Bengal's indigo industry', in: Van der Linden and Lucassen (eds.), *Working on Labor. Essays in Honor of Jan Lucassen*, 47-73; Ulbe Bosma, *The Sugar Plantation in India and Indonesia: Industrial Production, 1770-2010* (New York 2013).

74 Touraj Atabaki, 'Writing the Social History of Labor in the Iranian Oil Industry', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 84 (Fall 2013) 154-158.

centuries as well, but also the important role of women and children in the labour market. From now on, they can no longer be neglected.⁷⁵ Not only was the geographical scope of labour history gradually but unavoidably becoming global, but also its time horizon receded to 1500 and sometimes even to the Middle Ages and classical antiquity.⁷⁶ This became clear in the first state of the art of global labour history, which came out in 2006, as well as in other stocktaking publications.⁷⁷

Whereas the IISH had focussed on global labour history, other research groups at history departments had defined different fields of interest, although often rather related to labour history issues, and also often globally oriented. Although the IISH research department remained unique for a number of years, similar practices became both the norm and normal among Dutch social and economic historians. A fine example is the *Global Economic History Network (GEHN)*, in which the social and economic departments of Utrecht University played an important role. In its 2005 conference about 'The Rise, Organisation, and Institutional Framework of Factor Markets', there was also ample room to incorporate labour markets, and the entire 2007 conference was devoted to labour productivity and skills.⁷⁸ Similar developments took place at for example Leiden (migration history), Eindhoven and the Vrije Universiteit (the history of techniques including maritime history), and Nijmegen (the history of the family).

A good example of recent achievements in the history of work and labour provides the history of the sailors, crewing Dutch mercantile and

75 Marjolein van Dekken, *Brouwen, branden en bedienen. Productie en verkoop van drank door vrouwen in de Noordelijke Nederlanden, 1500-1800* (Amsterdam 2010); Daniëlle van den Heuvel, *Women and entrepreneurship. Female traders in the Northern Netherlands c. 1580-1815* (Amsterdam 2007); Idem, 'Selling in the shadows: Peddlers and hawkers in early modern Europe', in: Van der Linden and Lucassen (eds.), *Working on Labor. Essays in Honor of Jan Lucassen*, 125-151; Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk, *De draad in eigen handen. Vrouwen en loonarbeid in de Nederlandse textielnijverheid, 1581-1810* (Amsterdam 2007); Idem, 'The first "male breadwinner" economy'? Dutch married women's and children's paid and unpaid work in Western European perspective, c. 1600-1900', in: Van der Linden and Lucassen (eds.), *Working on Labor. Essays in Honor of Jan Lucassen*, 323-352; See also the contribution by Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk in this issue.

76 For guild studies, see the contribution by Maarten Prak in this issue; another example of long-term trends in social and economic history combined provides the history of coin circulation, see: Jan Lucassen, 'Deep Monetization: the Case of the Netherlands 1200-1939', *TSEG* 11 (2014) (forthcoming article).

77 Lucassen, 'Writing Global labour History'; Heerma van Voss and Van der Linden, *Class and other Identities*; Van der Linden, *Workers of the World*.

78 For the 2007 conference, see Maarten Prak and Jan Luiten van Zanden (eds.), *Technology, Skills and the Pre-Modern Economy in the East and the West* (Leiden/Boston 2013).

navy vessels.⁷⁹ Of course, they had not been forgotten before the 1970s, but the Leiden professor of maritime history Jaap Bruijn and his successors opened up an entirely new field in what I understand here as labour history. The significance of this strongly international workforce for the economic expansion of the Republic was new. Immigration became the key word. At the same time, boarding sea-going merchant vessels was characterised as a last option, not only because of the supposedly low remuneration and strenuous work, but also because of the high mortality rate, especially in the tropics.⁸⁰ There has been no other maritime nation in Europe that depended to such an extent on immigrants as the Dutch, at least in European waters, whereas mixed crews were less rare in the Atlantic, and certainly were quite common in Asia.⁸¹

The apparent attraction of maritime jobs has become more comprehensible as the original picture of desperate men seeking the worst possible type of employment in order to avoid starvation or at best charity, had to be given up. Danielle van den Heuvel showed convincingly how attractive the possibility of *maandbrieven* (month-letters) was to sailors in the VOC for transferring part of their wages to their wives, parents or children they left behind. She concluded that the sailor's profession certainly enabled a family life above subsistence level.⁸² Furthermore, the Dutch Republic not only imported muscle from its Scandinavian and German hinterlands and beyond, but the first results of numeracy studies suggest that the general

79 Similar vignettes could be written about the history of domestic service, prostitution, textile spinning and weaving, or brick making.

80 J.R. Bruijn, 'De personeelsbehoefte van de VOC overzee', *BMGN* 91 (1976) 218-248; Idem, 'Zeevarenden', *Maritieme Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* Vol. 3 (Bussum 1977) 146-190; Jan Lucassen, 'Zeevarenden', *Maritieme Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* Vol. 2 (Bussum 1977) 126-158; J.R. Bruijn and J. Lucassen, *Op de schepen der Oost-indische Compagnie. Vijf artikelen van J. de Hullu* (Groningen 1980); Van Royen, Bruijn and Lucassen, 'Those Emblems of Hell?'; Unger, *Shipping and Economic Growth*; See also Jelle van Lottum, 'The economic contribution of labor migrants in the European maritime labour market of the long eighteenth century', in: Van der Linden and Lucassen (eds.), *Working on Labor. Essays in Honor of Jan Lucassen*, 247-267; Maarten Prak and Jan Luiten van Zanden, 'Demographic change and migration flows in Holland between 1500 and 1800', in: Van der Linden and Lucassen (eds.), *Working on Labor. Essays in Honor of Jan Lucassen*, 237-245.

81 Matthias van Rossum, Lex Heerma van Voss, Jelle van Lottum and Jan Lucassen, 'National and International Labour Markets for Sailors in European, Atlantic and Asian Waters, 1600-1850', *Research in Maritime History* 43 (2010) 47-72; Van Rossum, *Werkers van de wereld*.

82 Danielle van den Heuvel, *Bij uijtlandigheid van haar man: echtgenotes van VOC-zeelieden, aangemonsterd voor de Kamer Enkhuizen (1700-1750)* (Amsterdam 2005); Manon van der Heijden, 'De gezinseconomie in Hollandse havensteden 1580-1800', *Holland. Historisch Tijdschrift* 45 (2013) 102-109; cf. also Hugo Landheer, 'Een maandceelhouder en zijn klanten. De Amsterdamse logementhouder Hendrik Klaver', *Holland. Historisch Tijdschrift* 45 (2013), 137-145.

educational levels of the foreign sailors may have been even higher than that of the Dutch on board. This may be consistent with the observation that labour productivity gains in shipping outpaced those in other economic sectors, not only in the Republic, but also in Europe as a whole. The Dutch success proves that this also holds true for mixed crews, i.e. both of mixed European nationals and of mixed European and Asian crews. Labour productivity may have even been enhanced by a certain degree of mixedness.⁸³ The latter point was eloquently demonstrated by Matthias van Rossum in his recent PhD. The VOC ships were crewed by the first real global workers: Dutch, German, Scandinavian, Belgian, etc., but also Bengalese, Chinese and Indonesian, working together and paid equally for equal work. This is in stark contrast with the sharp racial and concomitant remuneration divisions apparent from the second half of the nineteenth century.⁸⁴

Where are we now?

It has been a long and winding route from Dutch via European to global labour history, from case studies to comparative approaches, from a narrow base of scholars in different countries to a global community, from splendid isolation to integration with other aspects of history,⁸⁵ from mainly Dutch to English language publications, and from highly politicised polemics about the ‘right line’ for organisations in the past, present and future to an (for many practitioners, even compassionate) engagement-at-a-distance with the global problems posed to the modern working man and woman – overwhelmingly and increasingly free wage workers today. The necessary infrastructure is under construction,⁸⁶ publication platforms are available (increasingly in English) and a rich seam of secondary literature is filling

83 Jan Lucassen and Richard Unger, ‘Labour productivity in Ocean Shipping, 1450-1875’, *International Journal of Maritime History* 12:2 (2000) 127-141; Jan Lucassen and Richard Unger, ‘Shipping, Productivity and Economic Growth’, in: Richard W. Unger (ed.), *Shipping and Economic Growth 1350-1850* (Leiden/Boston 2011) 3-46; on labour productivity in relation to remuneration systems globally see Gijs Kessler and Jan Lucassen, ‘Labour Relations, Efficiency and the Great Divergence. Comparing Pre-industrial Brick-making across Eurasia, 1500-2000’, in: Maarten Prak and Jan Luiten van Zanden (eds.), *Technology, Skills and the Pre-Modern Economy in the East and the West* (Leiden/Boston 2013) 259-322.

84 Matthias Rossum, *Hand aan Hand (Blanken Bruin). Solidariteit en de werking van globalisering, etniciteit en klasse onder zeelieden op de Nederlandse koopvaardij, 1900-1945* (Amsterdam 2009); Idem, *Werkers van de wereld*.

85 Prak and Van Zanden, *Technology*.

86 U.T. Bosma, *Over de taak van de sociaal-historicus: mondiale problemen en digitale kansen* (Amsterdam: Oratie Vrije Universiteit, 2013); For important databases see <https://collab.iisg.nl/>

the libraries' shelves, for many parts of the world covering at least the period from the sixteenth century onwards, and definitely from the nineteenth century. This is certainly satisfying, but at the same time challenging, because now the big questions of our times can and have to be tackled. These seem to be shifting from the still important questions of global inequality (after all, the nearly immobile dividing line between 'the West and the Rest' is moving at last!) to global trends towards the weakening of labour contracts, increased working hours, and diminishing organisation intensities.⁸⁷ Global Labour History is at work as we speak.

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[web/labourrelations](#); <http://www.iisg.nl/hsn/>; <http://socialhistory.org/en/projects/clio-infra>;
<http://www.collective-action.info/>.

⁸⁷ Cf. Lucassen, *Outlines of a History of Labour*.

